

Attachment C

**U.S. EPA Letter to State EPA and Health Departments -
Mercury Response Matrix**



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 5
77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD
CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590

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copy to RSL
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IN PLY TO THE ATTENTION OF:

FEB 28 2001


RE: Response to Indoor Mercury Spills

Dear Sir or Madam:

This letter is to inform all the States of the recent guidelines the United States Environmental Protection Agency, Region 5 Emergency Response Branch (ERB) has developed relating to requests for response to mercury incidents. Recently, ERB has experienced a significant increase in requests from the States, Local Authorities, County Health Agencies, Responsible Parties and private citizens to evaluate and or respond to mercury incidents. These incidents can range from rather large scale responses down to an individual's primary residence. This increase is undoubtedly related to the press coverage given to the NICOR, People's Energy and Northshore Gas mercury regulator responses in the greater Chicagoland area.

A number of the reports and referrals the EPA receives are related to very small releases of mercury. EPA's legal authority to respond under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) may be more limited for very small volume spills (such as spills from broken thermometers or thermostats). Additionally, our region has experienced difficulties in providing resources due to the significant increase in responses to household accidents involving small quantities of mercury. Given these factors, EPA feels it is necessary to provide guidelines to our State partners to assist in determining when a federal response is appropriate.

Specifically, EPA has the authority to respond to indoor spills of mercury because of the threat that it may be tracked from the residence into the environment. Small amounts of spilled mercury from items such as thermostats and thermometers are less likely to be tracked to the outside. While mercury from these items *may* pose a health threat, these cases wherever possible should be handled at the state and/or local level (i.e. health departments, response agencies). EPA understands that each spill can be somewhat different in nature and is willing to provide technical and/or response assistance if a particular case requires it. In cases of larger quantity spills, or multiple residential mercury releases, EPA is fully prepared to respond to the incident if the State or local health agency requests assistance.

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Attached is a table that clarifies EPA's position on what efforts may be required for each type of mercury release. This table is not an absolute, but merely a guide as EPA realizes that each spill can have unique circumstances, and local and state response capabilities vary throughout the region. By clarifying our response strategy, we hope to prevent duplication of efforts and make the most effective use of the limited resources available to the state and federal agencies to address this and other emergency response needs. Please contact me at (312) 353-9295 if you have any questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Richard C. Karl, Chief
Emergency Response Branch

Attachments: Mercury Response Matrix
Address List

cc: Craig Beasley, OERR

Mercury Response Matrix

TYPE OF SPILL	APPROPRIATE RESPONSE LEVEL	RECOMMENDED ACTION
Small Quantity* Minimal Spread	Local / State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow small spill cleanup procedures developed by State agencies (examples are widely available on the internet). • Spill kits may be effective.** • Dispose as household hazardous waste.
Small Quantity Dispersed (i.e. swept with vacuum or broom)	Local / State (State or Federal support, if appropriate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen residence with air monitoring device. • Discuss air monitoring results with state health agency or ATSDR • Discuss cleanup options
Large Quantity*** (Outside of industrial facilities)	Contact Region 5 Mercury Spill Group (list phone number)****	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If relocation is recommended consult with the local health department. • If biological testing is recommended, public health may provide assistance. • U.S. EPA and/or State to lead clean up or to provide technical assistance to responsible parties. • Investigate whether contamination has been tracked offsite.

* A small quantity spill is one where the amount of mercury is similar to that of a typical oral thermometer or thermostat. The amount of mercury released by these manufactured items can be up to 5 grams or so.

** Spill kits are available commercially.

***These spills may result in contamination of residences, household possessions, and schools. They may cause health effects in developing fetuses and children 5 and younger. Exposed persons may need biological testing.

****Consists of State/County Health Departments, ATSDR, USEPA & State Environmental Agency.